

REMARKS

Claim 8 has been amended to claim a front protective portion having a proximal end adjacent to the main protective portion and a distal end opposite the proximal end, proximal coupling elements on the front flap at the proximal end and distal coupling elements at the distal end to releasably couple the placemat to the front arm of the chair by connecting the proximal coupling elements to the distal coupling elements, thereby securing the proximal end to the distal end..

Claim 37 has been cancelled. The substantive elements of claim 37, which depended from claim 35, have been incorporated into claim 35. Claim 35 therefore now includes a front flap disposed between the two side flaps, the front flap having a proximal end adjacent to the main placemat area and a distal end opposite the proximal end; a proximal coupling element on the front flap at the proximal end and a distal coupling element at the distal end to releasably couple the placemat to the front arm of the chair by connecting the proximal coupling element to the distal coupling element.

Claim 38 has been cancelled as being redundant in light of the amended claim 35 and original claim 36. Claims 44 and 45, depending from claims 8 and 35 respectively, have been added to claim further details of the structure depicted, *inter alia*, in Figure 2.

For the following reasons, applicant respectfully submits that currently amended claims 8 and 35 are allowable over Sugawara, alone and in view of Jones.

Sugawara discloses a table cover with integrated napkin portions extending beyond the side edges of a rectangular sheet. Sugawara further discloses between adjacent napkin portions a portion of said rectangular sheet into which slits are cut parallel with an edge of each napkin

portion. Sugawara discloses no function for the portion of the rectangular sheet situated between adjacent napkin portions nor any structures – coupling structures or otherwise – associated therewith. Sugawara alone, therefore fails to disclose or suggest the invention claimed in presently amended claims 8 and 35. More specifically, Sugawara does not disclose or suggest a front flap having a proximal coupling element on the proximal end of the front flap nor a distal coupling element on the distal end of the front flap for releasably coupling the placemat to a front arm of a chair by connecting said proximal coupling element to said distal coupling element, as claimed in claims 8 and 35.

Next, Jones discloses an apparatus for securing a table covering to a table by means of straps extending from the edges of said table covering, the straps wrapping around the table and connecting to one another underneath the table. Jones nowhere discloses any flaps extending from the table covering, nor is the table covering of Jones itself a flap. Jones does not disclose any flap which includes coupling elements capable of coupling one end of such flap to the other end of the same flap.

Examiner has stated that the combination of Jones with Sugawara would yield a protective table covering with a front flap having coupling elements. The rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103 based on this combination is erroneous for two reasons.

First, Jones discloses a table cover designed to be secured around the table upon which it is placed. Sugawara discloses a table covering with integrated napkin portions. These two references are related only in that they each concern table coverings. Despite this minimal relation, the two disclosures are quite different, each aimed at solving distinct, unrelated problems. Jones is aimed simply at securing a table covering to a table. By contrast, Sugawara is

concerned with providing a table covering with integrated napkins. There is no reason to believe that one of ordinary skill in the art would be motivated to combine the two references to solve the problem addressed by the present invention. Indeed, as the present invention does not address securing a table covering around a table top, there is no reason on skilled in the art would look to Jones at all, let alone combine it with Sugawara to address the problems solved by the present invention. A rejection based on the combination of these references is therefore improper because it lacks the requisite “motivation to combine”.

Second, even if one were somehow motivated to combined Sugawara and Jones, the resulting device would be markedly different from both the structure suggested by Examiner and from the device claimed in amended claims 8 and 35. Jones discloses a means for securing a table covering *to the table on which it is placed*, by securing a strap disposed on one side of the covering to a strap disposed on the other side of the covering. The two straps extend below the table and are joined together.

Once Jones is properly understood, the combination of Jones and Sugawara is instantly apparent: adding the teaching of Jones to that of Sugawara would yield a table covering having (i) integrated napkin portions and (ii) straps extending below the table top to secure Sugawara’s main body *to the table top*. Jones is not a flap nor does it disclose a flap, and so its addition to Sugawara cannot yield a flap, no less a flap having proximal and distal coupling elements, as claimed in amended claims 8 and 35.

Jones does not provide Sugawara with the missing claim element of claims 8 and 35; that is, Sugawara combined with Jones does not disclose or suggest a front flap having a proximal coupling element on the proximal end of the front flap nor a distal coupling element on the distal

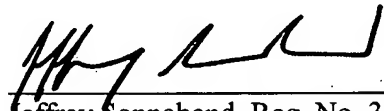
end of the front flap for releasably coupling the placemat to a front arm of a chair by connecting said proximal coupling element to said distal coupling element. Jones combined with Sugawara therefore does not render obvious claims 8 and 35, and claims 8 and 35 should be allowed.

The remaining claims all depend directly or indirectly from claims 8 and 35, and so for the reasons stated, are not anticipated nor rendered obvious by Jones and/or Sugawara. These claims should also be allowed.

For the foregoing reasons, applicant respectfully submits that the claims as presently amended are allowable over the cited art and requests that Examiner allow the application.

Respectfully submitted,

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